

INAUGURAL CALL

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# Abraham Lincoln's 1861 Inauguration

## Inaugural Ball

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the  
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection



*1<sup>st</sup> Inaugural Ball attire*

# MARY TODD LINCOLN

A B I O G R A P H Y

JEAN H. BAKER



W. W. NORTON & COMPANY

NEW YORK      /      LONDON

*1877*

sylvania, where the Willard brothers managed to feed as many as 1,500 guests a day. In the new order of things to which she was growing accustomed, both brothers greeted her on her arrival. She had chosen their hotel over its competitors because her husband's predecessor, James Buchanan, had been taken dangerously ill (some said poisoned) during his preinaugural stay at the National Hotel.

The presidential family had hired two bedrooms and two parlors, hoping to escape some of the hotel's communal life. Immediately Lincoln disappeared into one, surrounded by a stream of callers, most of whom either offered solutions to the worsening crisis between North and South or sought patronage jobs in his administration. Mary Lincoln meanwhile held teas for the local ladies, though many declined to attend. Even before the election southerners like Mrs. Senator Clement Clay of Alabama had refused to allow Republicans to escort them to dinner. By the secession winter of 1861 those members of Washington society who had not gone south had no intention of admiring Mrs. Lincoln. Instead, they gossiped among themselves about how common she was, though most had never met her.

Finally it was Tuesday, March 4—a raw, windy, but occasionally sunny day. There had been several threats that Lincoln should leave his wife at home because he would be shot or kidnapped, but Mary Lincoln had no intention of missing her Lincoln party's installation. Besides, General Winfield Scott had stationed his troops along Pennsylvania Avenue and around the Capitol. For the first time in American history a wooden barricade shielded those on the inaugural platform from the crowd, which numbered 30,000. After Senator Edward Dickinson Baker (now a senator from Oregon) had introduced her husband, Mary Lincoln watched Lincoln take the oath of office from the doddering Chief Justice Roger B. Taney. Then she listened to his conciliatory inaugural address, which concluded, "We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection." That night, surrounded by a retinue of sisters, cousins, and nieces ("a dozen Todds of the Edwards breed are in the house," complained Lincoln's secretary), Mary Lincoln put on a watered blue silk gown and sallied forth with her habitual pearls, some gold bracelets, and a few new diamonds.<sup>13</sup>

Her first inaugural ball as the president's wife took place in a disappointing temporary structure behind City Hall, and to Mary Lincoln's chagrin, etiquette required that she promenade not with her

## CHAPTER VII FIRST LADY

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4. Almira Lincoln Phelps to Mary Todd Lincoln, January 23, 1861, Robert Todd Lincoln Papers; W. O. Stoddard, *Inside the White House in War Times* (New York: Webster, 1890), p. 34; *New York Times*, February 11, 20, 1861; Elihu Washburne to Abraham Lincoln, January 30, 31, February 3, 1861, Robert Todd Lincoln Papers; Mercy Conkling to Clinton Conkling, February 12, 1861, Conkling Papers.
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11. Green, *Washington*, p. 238.
12. Dickens, *American Notes*, vol. 1, p. 281; Leech, *Reveille*, pp. 6-7.
13. Basler, *Collected Works*, vol. 4, p. 217; Dr. Robert King Stone to Professor Campbell Morfit, May 7, 1857, New York Historical Society; Allan Clark, "Abraham Lincoln in the National Capital," *Records of Columbia Historical Society*, vol. 27 (1925), pp. 1-175; Mrs. Virginia Clapton Clay, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1904), p. 140; Tyler Dennett, ed., *Lincoln and the Civil War in the Diaries and Letters of John Hay* (New York: Dodd Mead, 1939), p. 39.
14. Leech, *Reveille*, pp. 37-45; Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, p. 107; Clark, "Abraham Lincoln in the National Capital," p. 6; *New York Herald*, March 6, 1861.
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**Civil War Lost and Found: Lincoln's First Inaugural Ballroom**

Posted on [June 27, 2011](#) by [David Rotenstein](#)

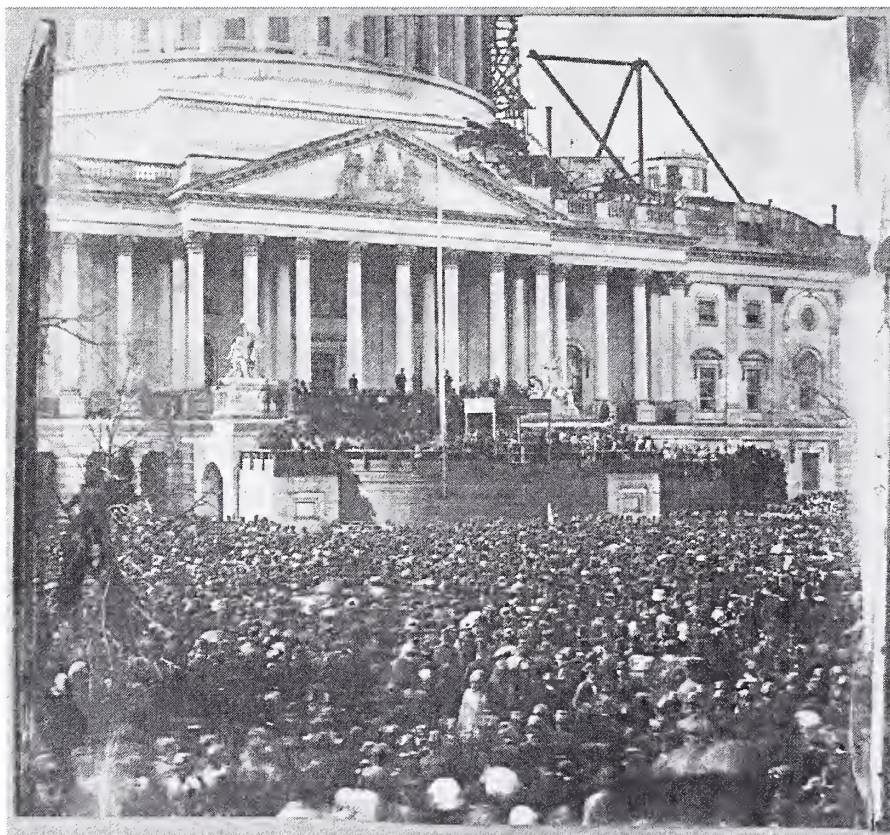


Dance card. Library  
of Congress image.

Abraham Lincoln began his first term as the 16<sup>th</sup> president of the United States in a ceremony held on the Capitol's east portico. About 25,000 people watched as Lincoln was sworn in Monday March 4, 1861. Lincoln left the Capitol and went to the White House, traveling in a carriage down Pennsylvania Avenue under tight security. Later that evening, the new president and his wife left the executive mansion for the traditional inaugural ball.

Many of the sites associated with Lincoln's inauguration were permanent buildings: The Capitol; Willard's Hotel (where the Lincolns stayed before the ceremonies); Pennsylvania Avenue; and, the White House. One piece of pop-up architecture that did not survive beyond the spring of 1861 was the ballroom where the Lincolns and their guests danced into the night

of March 4, 1861.



Inauguration of Abraham Lincoln, March 4, 1861. Library of Congress photo.

Every four years Washington prepares for inaugural festivities by sprucing up Pennsylvania Avenue and by constructing temporary buildings and structures to accommodate the throngs of people who descend on the city.



Frank Leslie's Illustrated  
Newspaper, March 23, 1861.  
Cover shows women at the ball.  
Library of Congress image.

Each of these pieces of pop-up architecture is meant to have a limited lifespan of a few hours before being dismantled and forgotten. Because of a convergence of events tied to the outbreak of the Civil War and the Union's first loss at Bull Run in July 1861, there is an interesting brief record that has survived about what became of Lincoln's first inaugural ballroom. That record lies buried in legal proceedings stemming from the confiscation of private properties by the federal government during the war.

The local and national press published lavishly illustrated accounts of the inaugural festivities. Historians and Civil War enthusiasts have written extensively on Lincoln's inauguration and his life and presidency have been dissected from many perspectives.

This brief post drills down into one small part of Lincoln's first day in office: The temporary inaugural ballroom that was constructed behind Washington's city hall. Dubbed the "white muslin Palace of Aladin," Margaret Leech wrote in her 1941 book,

*Reveille in Washington,*

*The palace was actually a temporary plank structure, divided into rooms for dancing and for supper, and dependent for dressing rooms on City Hall, ladies in the Common Council chamber, and gentlemen in the courtroom.*

The Union Ball began at 10:00 PM and the Lincolns arrived about an hour later. According to the *New York Times*, the ballroom was gas-lit and decorated with shields and flags. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* published an engraving showing the ballroom's interior the night of the big event.

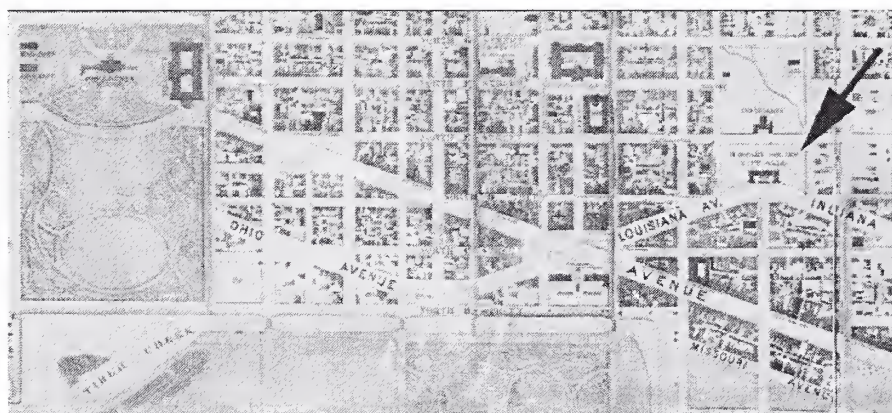


Lincoln's first inaugural ballroom. Frank Leslie's Illustrated, March 23, 1861. Library of Congress image



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In the 1860s, Washington's city hall was located in Judiciary Square east of the White House where Indiana and Louisiana avenues met north of Pennsylvania Avenue. Builder Job W. Angus constructed the yellow pine building for the inaugural ballroom. A New York native, Angus (1822-1909) owned the building up until the ball. He served in the inauguration proceedings as an assistant marshal. "It was mine when it was the ball-room and after the ball was over it was taken by the Government for the Soldiers," Angus said in a deposition taken in 1872.



Washington City Hall, c. 1857. Adapted from the Map of the City of Washington by A. Boschke, Library of Congress image.



Washington City Hall, c. 1866. Lithograph by E. Sachse & Co. Library of Congress image.

Moves to authorize the ballroom's demolition in early April, 1861, were halted. Within weeks of the war's start, troops were being housed in tents around the city hall and in the inauguration ballroom. By the start of the summer of 1861, federal authorities had decided to concentrate troops on Capitol Hill near the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad depot.

As activity shifted towards Capitol Hill, on July 16, 1861, the *Washington National Republican* reported that the ballroom was being dismantled:

*The inauguration ballroom, adjoining City Hall, which has lately been used as quarters for the troops and a drillroom by Captain Griffin's company of light artillery, is now being torn down.*

An ephemeral community of official buildings and shanties thrown up by entrepreneurs quickly grew along North Capitol Street and other streets near the B&O station. Business was booming as soldiers bought food, liquor, and the company of women.



Soldiers' Rest. Lithograph by Charles Magnus, c. 1864. Library of Congress image.

After Bull Run, the government confiscated private properties in and around North Capitol Street to build the way station that came to be known as the Soldier's Rest. They closed off streets, built fences, and constructed barracks and other buildings. At the heart of the Soldiers' Rest was a Gothic Revival cottage built in 1842 by architect, engineer, and artist John Skirving. After Skirving sold it to gasman James Crutchett in 1845, the property was dubbed Bethel Cottage and it became Crutchett's home and laboratory for the development of urban gas lighting systems.



John Skirving's 1842 Capitol Hill cottage, c. 1900. Library of Congress photo

In the 1850s Crutchett expanded his Capitol Hill holdings and built the Mount Vernon Factory, a plant where he had planned to turn out great quantities of canes, picture frames, medallions, and other items manufactured from wood he had harvested from Mount Vernon. More on that, however, in a later post.

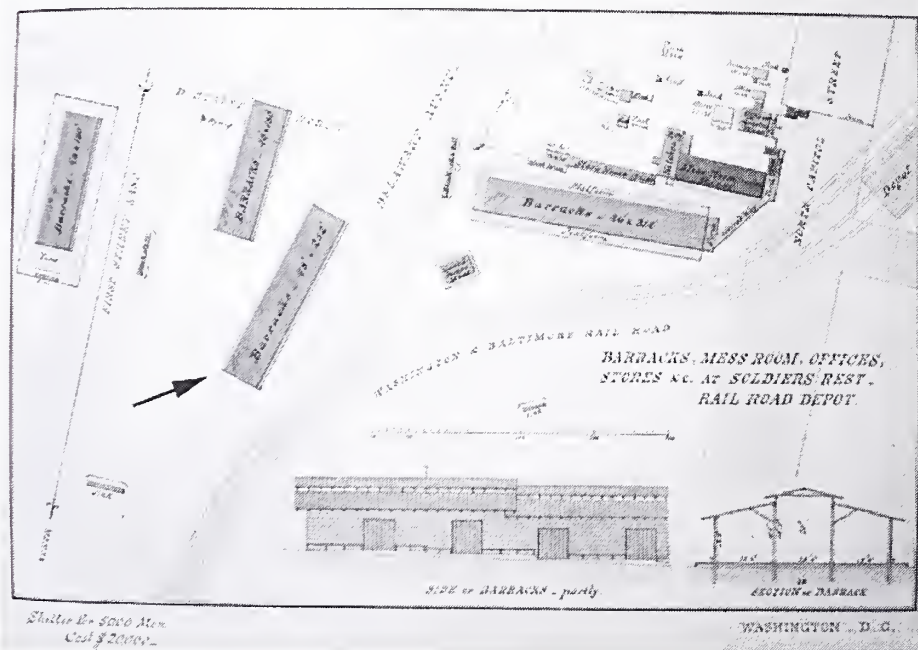
Now let's get back to the ballroom. With the war underway, the government contracted with Angus to deconstruct the Judiciary Square structure and to relocate it to Capitol Hill. "So I tore this building down and the Government paid me for constructing this building near the depot," he explained in 1872.

According to Angus,

*The inauguration ball-room stood right in the rear of the City Hall. The ball was in March. I rented it for a month or six weeks and then tore it down and built the Soldiers' Rest. They had it six weeks or two months. I rented it at \$250 a month.*

Angus lamented what had become of the ballroom he had built. In its reuse as quarters for soldiers, according to Angus, the materials were seriously damaged. "It was the best yellow pine flooring," he said. "It was almost entirely destroyed. They took it right up. I made it to dance on."

On Capitol Hill, Angus rebuilt the ballroom as a building measuring 250 feet by 50 feet and he was paid about \$12,000 for his efforts. U.S. Army maps show the building Angus built among the others built specifically for the Soldiers' Rest and the ones occupied and rented from Capitol Hill landowners like Crutchett. The rebuilt ballroom is easily identified in the maps by its dimensions, which Angus clearly described in his 1872 deposition.



Soldiers' Rest. Blue arrow points to the relocated inauguration ballroom building. Adapted from a National Archives and Records Administration image.

The Soldiers' Rest remained in operation throughout the remainder of the war. The facility was vacated by 1866 and the properties returned to residential and commercial uses. The next post in this series takes up where we left

off with James Crutchett in the 1850s as he was setting up his ill-fated Mount Vernon Factory venture. That post goes live July 21, just in time for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First Bull Run battle.

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Cross-posted at [Greater Greater Washington](#) (6/29/2011)

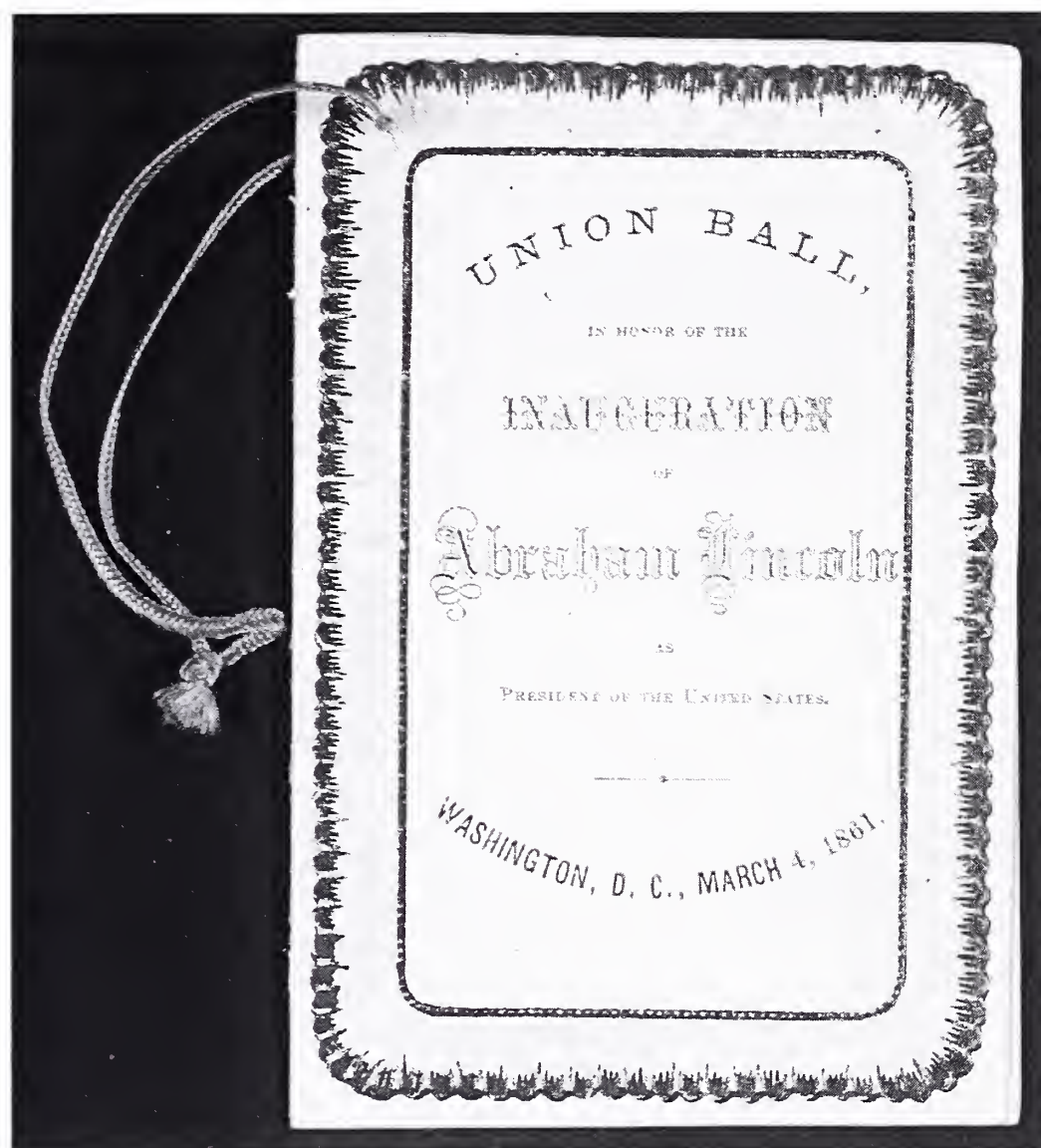
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## LINCOLN'S 1861 INAUGURAL BALL DANCE CARD

44. Wonderful Printed Inaugural Ball Dance Card, not signed, appx. 3 3/4" x 4 3/4", 4 pages, held together at the left margin by three tied ribbons - red, white, and blue. The card, dated the "Fourth of March, 1861" on the cover, includes a printed Lincoln quotation: "In devotion to the UNION, I hope I am behind no man. I promise you in all sincerity, that I bring a heart devoted to the work." Inside, the card lists all 16 dances (8 before supper, 8 after supper), and includes a dotted line for "ENGAGEMENTS". The back cover lists the names of the members of the Floor Committee. A wonderful memento. In excellent condition, with the 3 colored ribbons intact. \$ 750.00

45. Nice Partly-Printed Document Signed, as President, One page, Quarto, Washington, May 24, 1861. The document authorizes and directs the Secretary of State to affix the Seal of the United States to "a Warrant for the Remission of the fine and costs imposed upon Ezekiel D. Dyer." Boldly signed "Abraham Lincoln". In excellent condition. Perfect for display. \$ 3,500.00

46. Nice Autograph Endorsement Signed, as President, One page, appx. 3 1/4" x 7 1/2", May 24, 1861. Lincoln writes (in full): "The appointments indicated within, may be made, if agreeable to the Sec. of War. A. Lincoln. May 24, 1861." In excellent condition. \$ 3,200.00

*The appointments indicated within, may be made, if agreeable to the Sec. of War.*  
*A. Lincoln*  
*May 24, 1861.*

47. Nice Partly-Printed Document Signed, as President, One page, Quarto, Washington, September 20, 1861. The document authorizes and directs the Secretary of State to affix the Seal of the United States to "my Proclamation of the additional articles to the General Convention with Denmark, of 1826, concluded and signed on the 11th of July, last,". Boldly signed and dated: "Abraham Lincoln 20th September, 1861". In fine condition. Perfect for display. \$ 4,000.00

## RARE MARINE CORPS COMMISSION SIGNED BY PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN

48. Document Signed, as President, One page, Large Folio, Washington, D.C., April 1, 1862. The document appoints Percival C. Pope, with the consent of the Senate, to the rank of First Lieutenant in the Marine Corps. Countersigned by **Gideon Welles** as Secretary of the Navy. Engraved vignettes of an eagle at the top and swords, cannons, & mythological sea creatures at the bottom. White wafer seal affixed at lower center. Boldly signed by Lincoln. Overall condition is fine. Marine commissions are very rare. Perfect for display. \$ 4,500.00

49. Nice Autograph Endorsement Signed, as President, appx. 2" x 3 1/2" in size, October 9, 1862. Lincoln boldly writes: "Submitted to Gen. Halleck. A. Lincoln. Oct. 9, 1862." General Henry Halleck was commissioned by President Lincoln a Major-General in command of the Department of the Missouri. In excellent condition. A wonderful example for display.

\$ 2,500.00

*Submitted to Gen. Halleck.*  
*A. Lincoln*  
*Oct. 9, 1862.*

